

Poetry and Cinema

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Poetry can be seen as a means of communicating an idea with a unique vision. In fact, the same approach can be applied to cinema. Indeed, literature precedes the making of a film in most cases. The preparation of a movie is written in much details, be it for the story, scenes, dialogues, storyboard, or through technical descriptions. In that extend, words are the genesis of cinema. But poems represent a distinctive expression of one's point of view in a metaphoric perspective, away from common creative composition. This freedom of expression is the purpose of many a filmmaker with daring and innovative practice. This study will concentrate on the link between filmmaking and poetry, based on the instruments of cinematography, music, and storytelling.

Keywords: Poetry, Cinema, Art, Metaphors, Narrative, Cinematography

Introduction

In the early days of cinema, filmmakers expressed concerns about linking movies and literature. The parallel between text and pictures was perceived as somehow obstructive, since moving images were flourishing as a novel way of expression. So the concentration remained on film as the art form exclusively dedicated to the present in its essence, as it was free from the restraints of history (Monaco, 2009).

The cinema industry has grown unpredictably over the years, and filmmakers eventually revealed that the pure poetry of image is rendered more powerful when coupled with metaphors. A poem can inject emotion into the characters of a story, and can speak for them when they need to address intimate feelings. Poetry in cinema provides layers of sense that, ironically, connect a film to a what early film makers tried to stay away from. In addition, the poetry of images translates to abstraction: some creative movie directors try to distance themselves from the common techniques of storytelling with a comprehensible narrative, to approach cinema as an artistic form, with the flexibility rhymes, verses, and symbols can offer.

The Influence of Poetry on Cinematographic Narratives

Narrative films tell fictional stories. So cinema is not necessarily a realistic approach to the practice of unfolding a plot. Poetry played a vital role in the development of cinematic narratives with the instruments of cinematography, and further led to the evolution of poetic narrative films. Such movies include Japanese director Takeshi Kitano's productions, with for instance, the singularly poetic imagery of his feature film *Dolls* (Kitano, 2002). It is evident that the combination of filmmaking and poetic literature is essential to most authors in the development of their creative practice, and in the style of the work itself. Therefore, poetry has a fundamental impact on the making of narrative movies by communicating some intrinsic features of the story that could not be depicted otherwise.

How Poetic Vocabulary Translates to Cinematographic Tools

Poetic vocabulary and techniques are themes that are encompassed in the art of writing—creating rhythm and generating a unique atmosphere. The mechanisms include: verses, rhymes, alliteration, assonance, figurative language,

homonyms, homophones, metaphors (Debrix, 1956). Cinematography is an art of visual expression that manipulates several aspects of the pictures by applying specific techniques, such as image composition, the manipulation of brightness, hue and saturation, but also camera shots, focus, depth of field, image scale, camera movement, as well as the use of light, to visually translate complex elements of the story (Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 1997). The notion of light relates to the interaction with nature. This theme is an essential subject of poems. Words can represent a translation of natural phenomena to express feelings, as images of a movie can figure the inner reflection of a character in a story, without having to rely on dialogues. Additionally, film is images, that are by their nature a representation of the world—as are words in prose.

How Cinema Can Use Poetry to Communicate a Director's' Thoughts

In the recent years, the film industry has embraced the use of metaphors and poetry in cinematic storytelling, be it as a subject matter, an instrument of narrative, or a stylistic approach. Some of the techniques such as B-Rolls for instance, introduce scenes, without any connection to the plot, but to communicate a mood. Additionally, in contemporary animation, the use of personification can convey the filmmaker's thoughts and ideas (Debrix, 1956). In this sense, as it is in poetry, virtual characters suggest, illustrate, can represent concepts and emotions of a profound significance through symbolism (Saint-Exupery & Woods, 2009). Furthermore, independent filmmakers find a voice closer to poetry in their creative approach: the genesis of their projects is based on an abstract notions, and intuition, just as it could be with poets, lead by a singular need to express themselves in their own way, with a unique vocabulary, be it with words or images. Additionally, this method allows for more flexibility in respect to the dimensions of time and space, as well as logic. The common concepts of reality can be destructured and manipulated for the purpose of a more sophisticated message. For instance, director Todd Haynes uses several actors of various ages and races to play one single character in *I am not there* (Haynes, 2007).

Means and Implications of Using Poetic Tools in Movies

Various methods are available for a director to utilize poetic tools in a cinematic work. Beyond the scenario and references to literature, the pictures themselves generate connections and metaphors, in which the author can infuse his personal creativity. Image composition, camera angles and light—essential elements of cinematography—are mechanisms in which the art takes shape, but they make sense once edited and repositioned in a broader context of the narrative. This technique is similar to the writing of verses in a poem. The instruments of poetry can be interpreted in film:

1. Use of narrative;
2. Use of visuals; and
3. Use of music and sound.

These tools have important implications in the movie; they affect the story in a variety of aspects: storytelling, pictures, sound. The movie is based on elements of the story that are related by a fundamental theme. This connection can be distorted with the editing. But to be coherent with the storyworld, the logic needs to be unified by a system of distinct rules that are specific to the film, making it understandable and enjoyable (Monaco, 2009). Poetry uses similar mechanisms with the use of words and sentences.

It is also crucial to note the cinematographic ideologies and movements, where the structure of the movie is questioned, and where answers can be found in a poetic approach to filmmaking.

In this regard, many authors addressed the notion of creation in their own creative work. For instance, choreographer Maya Deren terms her approach the poetry films (Deren & McPherson, 2005). However, in this endeavor, one must focus on the principles and fundamentals of poetry, which is a choice to make in terms of technique. Maya Deren translates poetic idea into body movements and camera shots, with a technique primarily based on motion. The decision to create a piece of art with one's personal rules defines the processes to create style. While in poetry, it is achieved with the manipulation of rhymes, in film, it is with images that resonate among themselves, music that

creates a rhythm, and editing that generates a narrative. In this regard, some film writers, producers and directors also felt the need to belong to a certain ideology when working on a project, which brings cinema closer to a synthesis of poetry, such as:

- New Wave Cinema, where the rules of filmmaking are challenged and recontextualized;
- Dogme 95, where some restraints create a realistic approach to the story; and
- The Minnesota Declaration, in which Werner Herzog mentions a 'poetic, ecstatic truth' (Herzog, 2010).

Additionally, with *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), Dziga Vertov wrote as part of a manifesto that his 'film presents an experiment in the cinematic communication of visible events without the aid of intertitles (...), without the aid of a scenario' (Vertov, 1929). Words in this instance, are replaced by moving images, but the work truly appears as a visual poem.

Conclusion

With a distortion of time and space, audio and images manipulated, the meaning of film can be refocused. This modification of context is the essence of poetry: metaphors. Beyond the common film narratives, experimental cinema can convey unorthodox visions of authors to tell unique narratives. This approach can bring a loss of cognitive connection with the story, but at the same time a loss of limitations and constraints, freeing the director from the general rules of rationality. In this sense, artist Jean Dubuffet stated: 'what I expect from any work of art is that it surprises me, that it violates my customary valuations of things and offers me other unexpected ones.' (Dubuffet, as cited in Selz, 1981).

Poetry and cinema have in common the process of creating with the purpose of evolving away from expected forms of stories and methodologies. Cinema being a form of poetry, they are inextricably interconnected and entangled. Many a director refers to poetry as means of telling a story but also as a real independent grammar for a film, with its own rules and vocabulary, to be constantly re-inventing itself. There lies the essence of cinema.

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